

8. OCCURRENCE OF LESSER FLORICAN (*SYPHEOTIDES INDICA*) IN KANHA NATIONAL PARK

Lesser florican is found during the monsoon months in the drier parts of Gujarat, Rajasthan and western M.P. where suitable grasslands exist. The Bengal florican (*Eupoditis bengalensis*) occurs in the riverine grasslands from Assam westwards to the terai areas of U.P. Sálím Ali and Ripley mention their having been reported as far east as the Teesta River in Bengal, but all such occurrences have been in the Gangetic valley. I have not come across any report of the lesser florican in Madhya Pradesh east of Bhopal.

In June 1969 I saw a female lesser florican on the Kanheri Maidan in the Kanha National Park. The grass was short and turning green with the pre-monsoon showers.

On 21-5-71 I saw another female lesser florican practically on the same spot. It was disturbed by some blackbuck moving away from

my jeep. I had very clear views of it and took a movie of it, putting it up altogether six times. As male lesser florican change to their nuptial plumage about this time, I was very keen to ascertain whether it was a male that was undergoing transformation, or was indeed a female. It did not have the tell-tale head plumes and was obviously a female. It was also clear that it was not a female of the Bengal florican. The bird was not sulking and was in fact fairly confiding, as these birds often are when they first appear at the onset of the monsoon.

The purpose of writing this note is to elucidate information from the editors and readers whether there has been any record of the lesser florican in Central India as far east as the Kanha National Park in the Mandla district of Madhya Pradesh.

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August 6, 1982.

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9. UNUSUAL ADOPTION BY TAILOR BIRDS (*ORTHOTOMUS SUTORIUS* PENNANT)

A pair of tailor birds resident in my friend Dr. Salvi's garden at Parel has been under our observation for the last two years.

In August 1980, a peculiar nest was seen in this garden on a *Gardenia* tree. The fibre cup nest was not completely covered with leaves but though apparently not complete, the female laid three eggs and started incubating. After a few days, the nest was abandoned probably because the birds were disturbed by some children.

The pair was always seen moving around the same garden, hopping amongst *Thunbergia* creepers, feeding on the nectar of *Lantana* flowers and insects. Dr. Salvi got quite interested in this pair and everyday in the early morning, while watering the garden, he kept a watch on the pair still roosting. It was found that the pair had become permanent residents of the garden and every night the birds roosted in the same *Gardenia* tree, almost on the same branch.

On the 2nd of November 1981, some boys pulled down a tailor bird's nest with two chicks from a Tagar (*Ervatamia coronaria*, Stapf) bush near a building about 500 metres away from Dr. Salvi's garden. There are three lanes and eight buildings in between these two places. The boys brought this nest with the chicks which looked about a week old, to us. Not knowing what to do, we tied this nest with the chicks in it, at the same place in the *Gardenia* tree, where the tailor birds had been found nesting last year.

We kept watch on the nest and to our

surprise and pleasure, found that the birds took interest in these chicks. Initially they watched the chicks from close quarters. Next day we found that the pair had adopted these orphaned chicks and both male and female were feeding them with insects.

Unfortunately the next day, one of the chicks was found dead due to an unknown cause. The pair however continued to look after the remaining chick successfully. On the 11th day both the foster parents were seen teaching it to fly and after two days the bird embarked on its first solo flight.

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## 10. COMMUNAL USE OF VILLAGE PONDS BY THE MUGGER CROCODILE (*CROCODYLUS PALUSTRIS*), CATTLE AND MAN

(With a plate)

### INTRODUCTION

In contradiction to the common and unauthenticated belief, there are several instances in record indicating that the mugger (*C. palustris*) is a docile crocodile, leading, when allowed to do so, a friendly and peaceful coexistence with both cattle and man.

Bustard (1974) and Whitaker (1974) mentioned about the mugger's coexistence at the Killikudu reservoir in Tamilnadu. Acharjyo and Mohapatra (1978) have recorded that a mugger which escaped from the Nandankanan Biological Park, Orissa stayed in the zoo's lake which, at its periphery, is used by villagers and their cattle.

Further evidence of the innocuous nature

of the species is provided by the various accounts of crocodile worship (B. C. Choudhury, pers comm., Guggisberg 1972, Singh, L.A.K., in lit.) where mugger worship is often symbolised as a sign of veneration to Goddess Ganga or God Vishnu. The most remarkable were the mugger of 'Mugger Pir' in Pakistan. Andrew Leith Adams (1860), giving an account of the Mugger Pir wrote, "... The largest crocodile lives in a long, narrow tank separated from the others. The Fakirs and natives who worship in the neighbouring temples had painted his forehead red — they venerate the monster, making a salamn to his majesty whenever he shows himself above water...". It should be noted that the mug-